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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL KMDR KPAL KWBG KPAO IS
SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (01/26): WEST BANK: "CLEAN,
SILENT OCCUPATION MODEL"

Main Stories:

Al Quds and Al Ayyam lead with details of truce proposals between Hamas and Israel. Israel has offered an 18-month truce and Hamas has countered with a proposal for one year, according to reporting on Hamas discussions in Cairo. Al Quds quotes Hamas spokesman Ayman Taha stating in Cairo on January 25, that Hamas rejects linking the release of captured Israeli soldier Shalit to the opening of Gaza crossings. Taha also rejected the manipulation of Gaza reconstruction issues in efforts to politically blackmail Hamas. The paper adds that Egyptian Intelligence Chief Sulayman is scheduled to meet with a PLO delegation on January 26 to discuss a Gaza truce, opening crossings and lifting the Gaza "siege." Meanwhile, Al Ayyam's front page cites DPA in quoting Turkish Premier Erdogan stating that Turkey is willing to send civilian observers, but not military troops, to stabilize the Gaza ceasefire.

In coverage of U.S activities, Al Quds and Al Ayyam cite the Sunday Times in front page reporting about U.S. Naval vessels tracking Iranian ships suspected of carrying arms to Hamas in Gaza. The papers quote U.S. officials revealing that the U.S. "Joint Mission Squad 151" has been deployed to Gulf of Aden to carry out the mission.

Regarding special envoy Mitchell, Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page cites AFP when quoting experts from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, noting that President Obama's appointment of Mitchell is an indication of Obama's, "serious wish for progress" in the Middle East. Middle East expert Marina Ottaway reportedly highlighted that Obama resisted pressure by the "Jewish lobby" to appoint Dennis Ross or Dan Kurtz, because he understood that those candidates would be, "met with uneasiness in the Arab world."

Meanwhile, the front pages of Al Quds and Al Ayyam highlight an Israeli radio report noting that Mitchell is likely to endorse the Road Map peace plan.

In further U.S. policy news, Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page highlights comments by former U.S. senior official and current International Crisis Group Middle East program director Robert Malley stating in an undated interview, that boycotting Hamas has been a mistake and the U.S. should reconsider its policy towards the group. Meanwhile, on an inside page, Al Quds runs an AFP report that next month will witness intensive U.S. diplomatic efforts in Damascus, starting with a U.S. congressional visit to Damascus. Another inside page in the same paper, highlights an AFP story about President Obama reversing former President Bush's decrees one by one, including decisions on Guantanamo "prison", economic policy and abortion.

Calls for Palestinian unity made by EU ministers on January 26, lead news in Al Hayat Al Jadida and feature on all front pages. The ministers clarified that unity is needed to allow for the reopening of Gaza crossings and provision of European humanitarian assistance to Gaza, according to reporting.

Arms smuggling to Hamas is front page news in Al Ayyam and Al Quds. Citing AFP, Al Ayyam quotes Hamas member in Lebanon Osama Hamdan stating on January 26 that Hamas will continue to bring arms into the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Al Quds and Al Ayyam cite DPA in front page reporting on related comments by Israeli Foreign Minister Livni stating on January 26 that Israel will "attack" Gaza once again if necessary to prevent arms smuggling. On a different issue,

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Livni is quoted in the two papers warning of, "a conflict and break" in Israeli-U.S. relations should opposition leader Netanyahu become Israel's Prime Minister.

Al Quds' front page cites the Avitab website, a source close to Hashemi Rafsanjani, revealing that the Israeli military killed military advisors from Iran's Revolutionary Guard during the recent military operation in Gaza. The Iranian advisors were training Hamas militants on the use of Grad missiles to be fired at Israel, according to reporting.

In coverage of Gaza developments on the ground, Al Quds and Al Hayat Al Jadida's front pages report on the death of an infant in Gaza who succumbed to respiratory complications following the "annihilating, phosphorus bomb smoke" that filled her house when Israel bombed it during the recent conflict. The papers also cite Reuters in reporting that Egypt evacuated the Rafah border crossing on January 25 after receiving reports of planned Israeli strikes on the Palestinian side of the crossing. The papers report that Gaza "government" buildings and schools were also evacuated. Hamas spokesman Ihab Ghussayn later denied the reports of impending Israeli attacks and called them, "rumors from suspicious parties," that his government will track down, according to coverage. In separate reporting, Al Quds' front page runs January 25 statements by Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhum confirming that Hamas leader Mahmud Zahhar is in good health, thereby denying reports that Zahhar was injured in the "war on Gaza."

Al Ayyam front pages statements by Palestinian Authority (PA) officials regarding Gaza. The paper quotes PA Premier Fayyad from January 25 meetings with the EU Development and Humanitarian Commissioner Luis Michel and Middle East Quartet Envoy Tony Blair, demanding guarantees that there be no repeat of the "aggression" on Gaza and announcing a European pledge of 52 million Euros in assistance to the Palestinian people. In separate reporting, the paper cites Reuters when quoting PA Foreign Minister Al Malki stating in Brussels on January 25 that Israel cannot prevent the trial of its military personnel for war crimes. -----

WEEKEND NEWS:

Sunday, January 25

News of Special Envoy for Middle East Peace Mitchell's arrival in the region led in Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida. The papers reported that a senior Palestinian official told AFP that President Abbas will receive former Senator George Mitchell to, "discuss means

for reviving the Israeli-Palestinian peace process." According to Western diplomats, "it is expected that Mitchell will arrive in the region within the next few days in what appears to be a quick engagement of American efforts towards peace in the Middle East, reporting continued.

"As a result of Israeli restrictions and internal Palestinian division, reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip face several obstacles," according to front page headlines in all dailies. The papers detailed the obstacles in the way of reconstruction including, "Israel's rejection of international calls to fully reopen the crossings into that Gaza Strip, in reaction to Hamas' insistence that it oversee all international assistance. The reporting also highlights Israel's refusal to allow the Palestinian Authority to transfer cash to Gaza banks.

"Governmental and UNRWA schools resume their work in the Gaza Strip after one month of closure," according to all front pages. Reporting notes that many schools suffered significant structural damage and make-shift tents had been set up in some areas.

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Saturday, January 24

In U.S. diplomacy news, Al Hayat Al Jadida and Al Ayyam announced on front pages that, "Clinton calls President Abbas and a large number of foreign leaders" while a second front page story in Al Hayat Al Jadida headlined that,

"Palestinian National Authority (PA) welcomes the appointment of Mitchell as envoy for the peace process." The article quoted chief PA negotiator Ahmad Quray, stating that, "the appointment by President Obama of Mitchell on the first day after his inauguration along with the phone calls he made to President Abbas and regional leaders, in addition to the decision to send Mitchell to the region as soon as possible, reflect a positive atmosphere and indicate a real interest on the part of Obama's administration in [solving]the Palestinian question."

Lead headlines in Al Quds and Al Ayyam stated that, "100,000 Palestinians displaced and the number of victims is alarming." The articles outlined destruction of Gaza infrastructure and a U.N estimate that "hundreds of millions of dollars" will be needed to meet reconstruction needs. The U.N. also called for the "full" reopening of all the crossings into the Gaza Strip, "echoing the call of the American President Barack Obama..." Al Hayat Al Jadida's lead headline added, "A French warship to be stationed off the coast of Gaza to fight arms trafficking- Israel refuses international calls for reopening the crossings and agrees to security arrangements with Egypt."

BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Al Quds editorial runs under the title, "Perpetuating division is not acceptable" (01/26): "If the statements, leaked by the media yesterday [and attributed] to a Hamas official in Cairo are true; that the movement prefers to finalize the issue of calm with Israel, lift the siege and open the crossings before returning to the internal dialogue issue... then Palestinian citizens at home and in the diaspora fail to comprehend [why Palestinian parties are] opening direct or indirect communication channels with Israel, ...while internal Palestinian dialogue channels remain closed and the state of division between the two parts of the homeland becomes more permanent..."

2) Khaled Hrub opines in Al Ayyam under the title, "Occupation not the weapons of the resistance perpetuate conflict" (01/26): "International and regional blanket excitement, from Washington to Brussels through Tel Aviv and some Arab capitals, inspired by the goal to halt arms smuggling into Gaza, is a flagrant reversal of priorities and a [present] to the occupation force... The resistance has the right to bear arms as long as occupation exists. Any attempt to stop any form of resistance and opposition to the Israeli occupation, and the strengthening of the "clean, silent occupation" model, as is the case in the West Bank, is miserable, from a humanitarian point of view, and is politically short-sighted."

